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U.S. Naval Historic Center  
11 September Project  
Civilian Response

Interview with [name of Interviewee]  
December 12, 2001

[DISC ONE]

MALE INTERVIEWER: 2001 and I am interviewing, can you state your name?

VAN HARP: All right, you are going to record some of this, and, some of this . . .

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. 12 December, 2001 and I'm interviewing?

VAN HARP: VAN HARP.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, your position, Sir?

VAN HARP: I'm the Assistant Director in Charge of the Washington Field Office of the FBI.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, your phone number so, and the address?

VAN HARP: It's 202-278-3400, it's 601 4<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Washington.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. I'd like to get some brief biographical information before we get into September 11<sup>th</sup>. The year only that you were born and where you were born?

VAN HARP: Oh, 1945, Toledo, Ohio.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, where did you attend high school?

VAN HARP: Toledo, Ohio, I mean, Toledo Whitmer, but, let me ask you, now, how do I . . .

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MALE INTERVIEWER: Where did you attend college?

VAN HARP: University of Toledo.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, after college, you joined the FBI?

VAN HARP: Correct.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, you joined the FBI as a Civilian or a Special Agent?

VAN HARP: As a Special Agent.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And you graduated from the FBI Academy?

VAN HARP: Correct, in April, 1970.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, briefly, how did your positions between graduating and getting this current assignment?

VAN HARP: Well, I was a Field Grade Investigator for 11½ years. And I became a Supervisor in Charleston, West Virginia. I was transferred to Headquarters in a Staff position as a Supervisor in 1983. Rotated onto our Inspection Staff and then transferred to Buffalo, New York. I was the Assistant Agent in Charge, 1988 to 1994. Returned to Headquarters in a Staff position, managed the Health Benefits, personnel section. And, in April 1996, transferred to Cleveland, Ohio as the Agent in Charge for the Northern District of Ohio. And then in July of 2001, reported to my current assignment.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. Where were you on 11 September?

VAN HARP: I was vacationing with my family. We hadn't had a family vacation for about three years. And we had just started

our vacation when the first, and then when the first plane hit, I was paged with the 911 page and my secretary called. She told me about it, thought the strong potential of being a terrorist act and then had the family turn on CNN and we saw the second plane hit. I immediately began making preparations to return.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Where were you, or, can you not say?

VAN HARP: Yeah, I was down in Hilton Head.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay.

VAN HARP: And then with all the flights being grounded, I was making arrangements to rent a car and then it worked out with a, we have a small office in Beauford [sp.], South Carolina, and they had arranged to have the South Carolina/North Carolina and Virginia State Police ferry me all the way up. And, I was in the car getting ready to go and I got a 911 page from the office. And, they had special authorization to fly the, one of the FBI planes down and pick me up and I returned and I was back in, late in the afternoon, early evening to our command post.

MALE INTERVIEWER: In the Headquarters building?

VAN HARP: No, in the Washington field office.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, so, you got back at about 1400, around that?

VAN HARP: No, it was probably later, a little around 6, I think.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, at that point . . .

VAN HARP: It would be 1800.

MALE INTERVIEWER: About 1800.

VAN HARP: Uh-huh.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, at that point, did you proceed over to the Pentagon?

VAN HARP: No. I established, you know, we were already up, the command post was already up and functioning and briefed in and then later that evening went on over to the Pentagon.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Did you have, did you assume any command roles while you were in transit?

VAN HARP: No. I maintained contact with the office and followed the developments, but, waited until I reported on scene.

MALE INTERVIEWER: And, once you got on scene, what was your primary responsibility?

VAN HARP: Well, I was the, I had overall responsibility for our emergency response, actually, not emergency, it's the crisis response and crime scene management as well as the response to both airports, but, particularly to Dulles Airport, which was the site of the, which was the site of the hijacking of American Airlines 77. You know, they boarded there and then after it departed the plane was hijacked. So, we set up a command post and a substantial operation at Dulles Airport to do the criminal investigation at that location as well. And then coordinated the overall investigation from the command post in the field office

in the umbrella case as far as WFO's interest and responsibilities are concerned.

MALE INTERVIEWER: How did you coordinate with the fire department, EMS and USR groups?

VAN HARP: Well, we set up a command post at the crisis site, at the Pentagon, and then we established a joint operations center which was up at Fort Myer, which had the, you know, all the components of all the agencies that had responded. So, we effected it from here through that, and then we also had personnel assigned to our strategic operations center at our Headquarters as well.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Did you go, how did the chain of command go, essentially? Did it go from Pentagon to the Fort Myer to your office . . .

VAN HARP: Yeah, in a dotted line, if you will, from the forward command post at the scene, up to the JOC at Fort Myer, but, direct line, basically from the CP here.

MALE INTERVIEWER: To, but, did you coordinate at all with Tom Davies, the Federal Coordinating Office for FEMA?

VAN HARP: Well, we did, but, that was effected, somewhat, both through CIAC [ph.] but also on scene as well with my on-scene commander.

MALE INTERVIEWER: How long was there, was there any problem with not wanting fire officials and other types to enter the crime scene?

VAN HARP: Absolutely not. No. No.

MALE INTERVIEWER: There was no problem with that?

VAN HARP: There's no problem. The first objective, the, at that point, at that immediate response, the first responder, the primary concern is safety and rescue. And the crime scene is the second consideration. As you work through that search and recovery and rescue, then, as that diminishes, the importance of the crime scene increases.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Were any FBI officials involved in any of the rescue efforts?

VAN HARP: We had some of our agents that were involved in a collateral sense, if you will. They weren't actually, to my knowledge, pulling people out of the, out of the rubble and debris.

MALE INTERVIEWER: But, at a collateral sense they were supporting those people?

VAN HARP: They were assisting, supporting those people and . . .

MALE INTERVIEWER: Doing what they could do?

VAN HARP: Right, doing what they could do, very close to it.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Did, how long was it a crime scene for?

VAN HARP: Well, I can't, I can't give you the exact dates, but, I think it was, I'm trying to remember the date.

MALE INTERVIEWER: FEMA chronology places it, I think, 12 October, as, sort of, the end of the FEMA. I wonder if that's about the same?

VAN HARP: I think it was 17 October, actually, three weeks, I'm going to say it was about a month to six weeks is about, I'd have to give you an estimate on that because I don't have the dates with me.

MALE INTERVIEWER: I guess we can't really talk about what, what these investigators did in the Pentagon, that's pretty much . . .

VAN HARP: No, I mean, basically, it's . . .

MALE INTERVIEWER: Classified.

VAN HARP: Right. But, I mean, basically, it's like any crime scene, and I'm not minimizing that, but the intent was . . .

MALE INTERVIEWER: It's a, like a forensic type of an operation.

VAN HARP: Correct. Right. It's a search for any items as evidentiary or potential evidentiary value. And, it's a, there's an initial search and then removal and then a secondary search and analysis, if you will, at the North parking lot.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Were you the only folks doing that kind of research?

VAN HARP: No.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Did they have DPS and the state and local?

VAN HARP: Yeah, we had assistance from several other departments and it was a very, a substantial integrated, a coordinated effort, but it was law, basically law enforcement because it's evidence recovery.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Were you pleased with the performance of the other law enforcement groups?

VAN HARP: Absolutely. It was an extraordinary cooperative effort and it could not have been done without the full cooperation, which was readily available, didn't have to ask, everyone knew their responsibilities and their jobs and did it and did it extremely well with a minimal amount of, you know, departmental differences, which there really weren't. I mean, it was a very effective, smooth, seamless is a good way to, a seamless operation.

MALE INTERVIEWER: So, you were almost surprised in the fact, in how well it went?

VAN HARP: I, you know, I don't, I'm not really surprised, I mean, it's a testament to, I mean, everyone's response to what happened in the extreme tragedy. And, those kind of issues are secondary to, I mean, getting the job done and taking care of people that, whose circumstances were tragic.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Did, how did this investigation compare with other investigations you've worked on? Was it longer?



VAN HARP: No, it's still ongoing as we speak, the overall investigation. And, I think it'll continue to go on for quite a while. It's, it's the largest investigation in the history of the FBI, in my opinion. And, I'm sure it's probably the largest investigation in the history of the country.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Is there anyone else in your office who, (a) can talk to us, and (b) we should talk to?

VAN HARP: Yeah, I think ART EBERHART.

MALE INTERVIEWER: ART EBERHART.

VAN HARP: ART EBERHART is the Special Agent in charge of our Administrative Division here in this office. But, he has substantial experience in crisis management, management in crisis sites. He had been involved in TWA 800. He was over in Kosovo. And, he was the on-scene commander at the Pentagon.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. And, is his number the same, 278-2000?

VAN HARP: 278-3404, I believe is what it is.

MALE INTERVIEWER: 34 . . .

VAN HARP: Or you can get him through the 2000.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. And, what are the lessons learned?

VAN HARP: Boy, there's many of them, but, it's, again, it reaffirms the initial, the first couple hours are critical to personal and public safety and the, you know, and the rescue effort. And, it affirmed some of the structures and procedures

we have in place already and it reaffirmed my, my belief in the American people and our military.

MALE INTERVIEWER: If you had to do it all over again, is there anything you would do differently?

VAN HARP: Well, there's some, a couple of personal things. I would have tried to get here quicker. I mean, I was hamstrung because of the distance. I'd have tried to get here quicker and I would have made, no, I think we operated as well as could be expected under those circumstances.

MALE INTERVIEWER: But, it's, yeah, I guess the FBI is like the military, if one person is not there, or, is killed, the whole, the organization continues functioning seamlessly.

VAN HARP: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MALE INTERVIEWER: It's not dependent upon any one person.

VAN HARP: Absolutely. They would have accomplished that in the same fashion. I mean, it was an extraordinary effort by everyone, including our people. And, that would have been accomplished in that fashion and in that time, whether I was here or not.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Has any, have any awards and decorations been issued or authorized?

VAN HARP: Oh no, it's, no, it's . . .

MALE INTERVIEWER: Too early?

VAN HARP: It's way too early. I mean, as I said, the investigation is ongoing right now.

MALE INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, I think that's it.

VAN HARP: Okay.